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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000489

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DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRIED, DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: ABKHAZIA: UN BRIEFS WESTERN FRIENDS ON KODORI
INCIDENT

REF: A. TBILISI 476

[1](#)B. TBILISI 405

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On March 12, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Jean Arnault briefed the Western Friends of the Secretary General (FSG) on the alleged rocket and missile firing on Georgian villages in Upper Kodori on March 11 (reftel). Arnault said that the Georgians had agreed to convene the Joint Fact Finding Group to investigate the incident, although he signaled that the investigation, like past investigations, may not be conclusive. Separately, Arnault briefed on the results of the Abkhaz elections, which he said were a loss for the de facto government of president Bagapsh. On the upcoming renewal of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), Arnault argued for a substantial resolution rather than a technical rollover. He agreed to provide the Western Friends an advance copy of his UN report, together with recommendations for elements to include in the resolution. In a separate aside, German Ambassador Flor raised concerns about MOIA Merabishvili's approach to reforming the police force. End summary.

UN TO SEND FACT-FINDING TEAM TO UPPER KODORI

[1](#)2. (C) On March 12, UN SRSG Jean Arnault briefed a previously scheduled meeting of the Western FSG called by the German Ambassador on the alleged rocket and missile firing on Georgian villages in Upper Kodori late on March 11. U.S. Ambassador Tefft, UK Ambassador MacLaren, German Ambassador Flor and French Ambassador Le Fort attended. Arnault said that the Georgians had agreed to convene the Joint Fact Finding Group (including the UN, CIS peacekeepers, Abkhaz and Georgians) to investigate the incident. There was little damage, with most of the missiles entering the ground. Because the evidence would have to be excavated and examined, he said that the investigation would take some time and, like past investigations, may not be conclusive. He said that the CIS peacekeeping force claims that neither it nor the Abkhaz have the capability to fly helicopters at night. Arnault said the CIS peacekeepers located closest to Upper Kodori at "broken bridge" heard small arms fire and saw flares but did not see helicopters, but he had received separate information that helicopters were present.

ELECTIONS APPEAR TO BE A WIN FOR THE OPPOSITION

[1](#)3. (C) On the recent Abkhaz elections, Arnault said that the fact that a relatively small number of incumbents were re-elected indicates that the elections were a win for the opposition and a loss for the de facto government of

president Bagapsh. (Note: Georgian Deputy State Minister for Conflict Resolution Abashidze separately told us March 9 that the Georgians also believed Bagapsh had done worse than expected in the first round. End note.) A second round will take place on March 18. Still, Arnault was struck that despite the setback, members of the de facto government expressed confidence that the various political parties would be able to work together, in the same way as the current de facto government. He assessed that the outcome speaks to the level of discontent in Abkhazia. In the primarily ethnic Georgian region of Gali, he said that one parliamentarian was elected, with the other two seats being contested in the second round. Arnault assessed that the UN would not be able to make a full assessment until after the second round. He noted that participation was "fairly low," and that the campaign to discourage the ethnic Georgians in Gali from voting was successful.

MARCH 1 STUDENT PROTEST AT SHAMGONA

¶4. (C) Arnault briefed on the results of the UN investigation into the March 1 Georgian student protest at Shamgona. He said that students from Zugdidi - possibly pushed by the media - organized a protest against the Abkhaz elections in which they crossed the Inguri River into Abkhaz-controlled territory and then crossed back and gave an interview to local media. The students then returned back to Abkhaz-controlled territory - in what Arnault believes was an attempt to appear to be ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia - and when they reached the bank three were arrested by Abkhaz militia. A fifteen minute exchange of fire ensued in which no one was hurt. Arnault said he had no reason to believe

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that the protest was not a genuine student protest. Still, he planned to tell the Georgians and the Abkhaz that although the UN does not want to stifle free speech, it will discourage political actions which are likely to lead to ceasefire violations, such as protests along the ceasefire line. He said he did not rule out additional spontaneous activities as the second round of elections approaches.

UN PREFERS SUBSTANTIAL UNOMIG RENEWAL RESOLUTION

¶5. (C) On the upcoming UNOMIG renewal resolution, Arnault said that he preferred a substantial renewal, which would put down next steps for the parties, rather than a technical rollover. He suggested that any resolution should not offer new requests but simply reiterate previous requests including a meeting between Saakashvili and Bagapsh. He updated on progress in pushing the sides to complete a series of steps before the UN report is submitted at the end of the March (reftel B). On the Abkhaz side, he said that there would be an UN Human Rights sub-office in Gali, the formalization of an UN Civilian Police contingent, and, he hoped, a public statement by de fact president Bagapsh that there would be no forced passportization of Gali residents. He said the school issue is more sensitive. Arnault said that Abkhaz policy is to require all schools to teach in Russian but that the Abkhaz do not have the capacity to implement the policy. As a result, only 4 of the 15 to 19 schools in Gali teach exclusively in Russian. He offered to check whether the Abkhaz commitment to start funding schools as of January 1 would require that that those schools teach in Russian.

¶6. (C) On the Georgian side, he said that there was a joint UN-CIS peacekeeping patrol of Upper Kodori last week, which uncovered no new heavy weapons or serious violations. He said that the Georgians have no offensive capability in Upper Kodori. He noted that the heavy weapons left by warlord Kvitsiani remained, although they were stored in one place and not hidden. He said that the number of police, according

to the Georgians, is now 283, and that the Georgians have committed to bring the number in line with the ratio of police to citizens in the rest of the country. Arnault said the Georgian intention is to be able to hold for 24 hours against any attack, which UNOMIG Commander Khattak believed could be done with a smaller force. All agreed that this may be made more difficult by the March 11 incident. Arnault said that the issue of notification and verification of all vehicles going into Upper Kodori remained unresolved. He said the UN would meet with the Ministry of Interior today to try to improve the procedure.

GERMAN RAISES CONCERN WITH MOIA APPROACH TO POLICE REFORM

17. (C) In a private aside after the meeting, German Ambassador Flor conveyed to Ambassador Tefft her concern about MOIA Merabishvili's approach to police reform. She said that a German police expert attended and presented at a recent conference in Bakuriani for local police, where Merabishvili made two statements of concern. On the issue of combating drugs, Flor reported that Merabishvili directed police to "criminalize and target the addicted" by depriving them of their jobs and denying them the ability to participate in normal life. Of more concern, she said, was Merabishvili's alleged directive on the police mandate, which he reportedly said was to create dossiers on "fools" -- the mentally ill, the opposition, and prostitutes and their clients. This, she said, sounds like the old KGB. She said that Merabishvili talked openly, in the open presence of a German police officer. She said that this would be a throwback to the old days and not an example of moving toward European and American standards. The Ambassador agreed. (Note: We intend to follow-up with Merabishvili. End note.)
TEFFT